

Message Text

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44

ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07

PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 SY-10 SCCT-02 SAB-01

IO-14 DRC-01 /100 W

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O 151134Z MAR 74

FM USINT DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 190

INFO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0232

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, IS

SUBJECT: ARREST OF MURDERERS OF JEWISH GIRLS

REF: A. DAMASCUS 208; B. TEL AVIV 1527

1. ON DAMASCUS AFTERNOON RADIO NEWS OF MARCH 14, THE SYRIAN MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR ANNOUNCED THE ARREST OF FOUR MEN ON THE CHARGE OF THE RECENT MURDER OF FOUR JEWISH GIRLS (SEE REFTEL). ALTHOUGH NOT MANY DETAILS WERE GIVEN IN THE BROADCAST, IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT TWO OF THE ACCUSED ARE MUSLIMS AND TWO ARE JEWS. BOTH DAMASCUS NEWSPAPERS OF MARCH 15 CARRY PROMINENTLY PLACED STORIES GIVING MORE DETAILS (COMPLETE TRANSLATION BEING SENT SEPTTEL). THESE STORIES SAY THAT THE MURDERERS ARE A BAND OF PROFESSIONAL KILLERS, ROBBERS AND SMUGGLERS WHO HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN A SERIES OF CRIMES OVER A RECENT BUT UNSPECIFIED PERIOD. THE STORIES STATE THAT THE INVESTIGATION OF THESE CRIMES HAS NOW BEEN COMPLETED AND THE CASE HAS BEEN REFERRED TO THE SUPREME STATE SECURITY COURT. THE STORIES ALSO QUOTE A STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR TO THE EFFECT THAT "THE ZIONISTS" ARE NOW ATTEMPTING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS

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INCIDENT IN ORDER TO LAUNCH "A RABID CAMPAIGN" TO COVER

UP THEIR OWN "BRUTAL CRIMES" AGAINST ARAB CITIZENS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES.

2. COMMENT: FYI/NOFORN: ON THE MORNING OF MARCH 14 DURING A CALL ON PRESIDENT ASAD'S PRESS ADVISER ELIAS ON OTHER BUSINESS, I TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO MENTION TO HIM THE ISRAELI BROADCAST OF MARCH 13 CONCERNING THE MURDER OF THE JEWISH GIRLS. SPEAKING STRICTLY AS A FRIEND, I OPINED THAT THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD HELP ITS CASE IF IT OFFICIALLY CONFIRMED THE RUMORS I WAS HEARING IN TOWN THAT IT WAS IN FACT CARRYING OUT AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CRIME AND THAT THE MEN WHO HAD PERPETRATED IT HAD BEEN APPREHENDED AND WERE TO BE BROUGHT TO JUSTICE. PRESS ADVISER ELIAS AGREED WITH ME AND EXPRESSED HIS APPRECIATION TO ME FOR THIS ADVICE. I AM NOT CLAIMING THAT MY INTERVENTION WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN GETTING THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT TO MAKE THIS ANNOUNCEMENT, BUT I HAVE FELT OVER THE LAST COUPLE OF WEEKS, BASED ON CONVERSATIONS HERE IN DAMASCUS, THAT THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT IS APPREHENSIVE ABOUT THE EFFECT THIS CRIME MIGHT HAVE ON THE CURRENT SYRIAN/ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS. IN THIS CONNECTION, I NOTE THAT THE ISRAELI PRESS (TEL AVIV 1527) IS BEGINNING TO FOCUS ON THE IDEA OF LINKING THE FATE OF THE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY TO THE DISENGAGEMENT TALKS. I CAN FULLY APPRECIATE THE CONCERN OF THE ISRAELIS ABOUT THEIR SYRIAN CO-RELIGIONISTS, BUT I WONDER IF AN ORCHESTRATED CAMPAIGN AT THIS TIME MIGHT BACKFIRE IF THE SYRIANS DECIDE THAT THIS ISSUE IS OF OVERRIDING IMPORTANCE TO THE ISRAELIS, AS IS THE CASE OF THE ISRAELI PRISONERS OF WAR. IT MIGHT WELL BE SUCH A CAMPAIGN WOULD ENCOURAGE THE SYRIANS TO TAKE A HARDER BARGAINING POSITION IN THE UPCOMING TALKS IN AN EFFORT TO GET MORE OUT OF THE ISRAELIS THAN THE ISRAELIS MIGHT BE WILLING TO GIVE IN EXCHANGE FOR THIS UNFORTUNATE COMMUNITY. END FYI/NOFORN.

SCOTES

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